



CATAWBA COUNTY

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Department of Social Services

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Catawba County Social Services Honored for Best Practices at Social Services Institute

At the recent Social Services Institute, recently held in Hickory, Catawba County Social Services was honored for two Best Practices Awards. These awards are presented by the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services to local agencies who have implemented innovative techniques to address a need in their local agency, which can be modeled and replicated by other agencies to improve their efficiency. Catawba County was recognized in two areas.

One of the Best Practices Awards was presented for Cost Savings Measures and/or Improvements in Efficiency to the Expedited Paternity Testing program. This innovative program was created to ensure that paternity testing takes place in a timely and convenient manner. To accomplish this, all Child Support staff and Joy Brown, the Legal Assistant for Social Services' Child Welfare Attorneys are now trained to take lab samples for paternity testing.



"So many times, a parent will come to court one time, and then they are gone," explains Joy Brown, seen in the middle of the photo above, along with Jo Sloan, Program Manager for Family Services, at left, and Teri Armstrong, Training Coordinator. "The program allows us to minimize the time that kids are in foster care placements and to be able to put them with family members by having the means to quickly identify paternal relatives."

The local court system has been very complimentary of this innovation which has resulted in the expedited parental testing results and the resolutions of many cases that had previously been stagnant. This collaborative effort between the Legal and Child Support divisions has produced fantastic results for clients, yet has not increased agency costs.

According to Jo Sloan, who oversees the Child Support Unit, "By using existing staff in a more flexible way, the agency was able to achieve a much higher level of efficiency resulting in a higher level of service for families."

Catawba County Social Services was also honored for demonstrating Best Practices Award in Advancement in Staff and Leadership Development for their Business Office Minutes. These short and often humorous segments during staff meetings are used to communicate policy, process, or productivity tips and information. The message is generally backed up with a colorful PowerPoint presentation to reinforce key points.

Social Services Training Coordinator, Teri Armstrong has said, "As an agency with over 400 employees, communicating the small things that make life easier and create continuity is increasingly difficult." She created the Business Office Minutes to address this need.

The segments are later converted to print for our monthly newsletter, allowing for further reinforcement of the message. Topics are widely varied so as to apply to all staff, regardless of their position in the agency.

Catawba County Social Services has a long tradition of implementing new and innovative programs that improve the efficiency of the agency while reducing costs. For more information about Social Services, contact 828-695-5600.